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ABSTRACT

Comparisons between observed behaviors of fathers in a structured interaction situation with their five-year-old daughters and their reported behaviors as obtained from an interview are studied. Several consistencies and some differences were found. Consistencies occurred more often in fathers' helping and demanding behaviors, as well as in their behaviors indicating non-involvement with child. Inconsistencies were most frequent in their reported and observed degree of encouragement of child's independence. Issues related to fathers' role in child rearing and to influence of methodology upon results obtained with different techniques were discussed. (Author/NF)

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Relationships Between Fathers' Reported and Observed Behaviors with Daughters[1]

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Many different methods of studying parent-child relationships have been used including interviews, questionnaires, case histories, parent and child reports, and direct observations. However, relatively few comparisons have been made between different methods to determine similarities and differences in the data obtained (Smith, 1958; Bing, 1963; Antonovsky, 1959; Zunich, 1961; Brody, 1965; Douglas, 1968). Since it is often assumed that with all methods the investigator is measuring similar aspects of parental behavior, comparisons between results would appear to be of importance. In the present study parents and their children were observed in a structured laboratory situation during which the children's behaviors were controlled, in order to investigate children's effects upon parental behaviors. The parents were also interviewed and information was obtained concerning a variety of reported behaviors. Thus, the study afforded an opportunity to compare observed with reported parental behaviors.

Fathers have not frequently been included in studies of parent-child relationships, further, when they have been included, their participation has often been indirect. Mothers' or children's reports have usually been utilized to obtain information concerning fathers' reactions in specific situations. In the present study, both fathers and mothers were observed with their daughters, and were interviewed regarding their childrearing attitudes and behaviors. Considering the relative paucity of direct information concerning fathers' child rearing attitudes and behaviors, the findings related to the fathers will be presented in this paper.

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Method

Subjects. The Ss were 41 middle class parents and their daughters with a mean age of 5.1 years. The names of the children were obtained from school lists of children who would be entering kindergarten the following year in the Ithaca, New York School System.

Procedure. The Ss were contacted first by letter and then by telephone and asked to come to Cornell University to participate in a study of parent-child relationships. The parents were each observed separately in a structured interaction situation with their daughters and were interviewed concern-

ing their child rearing attitudes and behaviors using a modification of the Sears, et al (1957) interview schedule. Many of the interview questions were designed to specifically assess reported encouragement of dependent and independent behaviors. The Ss were informed that their behaviors would be observed and videotaped from behind a one-way mirror.

During the structured interaction situation, tasks were presented in counterbalanced order. One of the tasks was designed to make the children act independent (assembling an easy puzzle) and the other to make the children act dependent (assembling a difficult puzzle). To further encourage the desired behaviors, the children, while separated from their parents, were instructed that they would be able to do the easy puzzle by themselves and that they would probably need help with the difficult one. The parents were asked to be with the children during the performance of these tasks and were told that they could help their daughters if they so desired.

Using the videotapes, the children's behavior was rated for the amount of independent and dependent behavior which they displayed. Independent children's behaviors included their working on her own, not asking for help, making a statement of confidence, and showing initiative in exhibiting general independent behaviors. Dependent children's behaviors included their asking for help, following directions, watching the parent do the puzzle for the child, and asking about the absent parent. Parents' behavior was evaluated for control, verbalization, physical interaction, positive reinforcement, and general encouragement of dependence and independence. Observational data was coded in 15-sec. intervals by two unbiased observers until reliability was established. Mean interrater reliability on a sample of the data was .80 for the children's behaviors. Following the establishment of reliability, one of the raters scored the remainder of the tapes. The interview, conducted by two interviewers, stressed data concerning dependence and independence in children. After establishing reliability, ($\bar{x}$ = .81). the remainder of the interviews were coded by one rater.

Results

Earlier reports have presented findings indicating that the design was successful in producing the desired dependent and independent children's behaviors and that it was effective in eliciting differential parental responses (Osofsky & Oldfield, 1971). Data has also been presented dealing with the relationships between the children's and the mothers' and fathers' observed

behaviors (Osofsky & O'Connell, in press). The present paper will report results relating fathers' reported behaviors in the interview to those observed in the interaction situation, in an attempt to determine the relationships between reported and observed behaviors.

During the independence-producing situation (when the child was doing the easy puzzle), several relationships were found. The father's encouraging of the child's independent behavior related to his reports of having strictly enforced bedtime rules ($r = -.29$, $p < .05$), not allowing the child to go far away from the house alone ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$), feeling that it was very important for her to do well in school ($r = -.30$, $p < .05$), and being very strict with child ($r = -.33$, $p < .05$). The fathers, who asked the child questions designed to help her with the puzzle, reported that he felt it to be very important for the child to be obedient ($r = -.31$, $p < .05$), that he taught the child things, such as the alphabet, before she went to school ($r = .29$, $p < .05$), and that he was protective of her when she quarreled with other children ($r = -.30$, $p < .05$).

In the dependence-producing situation, the following relationships were noted. The father's asking questions designed to help the child related to his allowing her much independence at play ($r = .28$, $p < .05$), his reacting positively to being followed by the child ($r = -.30$, $p < .05$), and his giving her little verbal or physical discipline ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$, $r = -.28$, $p < .05$ respectively), but rather depriving her of privileges as punishment ($r = .33$, $p < .05$). The father's watching the child also related positively to his encouraging her independent behaviors in many ways ($r = .26$, $p < .05$). The father's encouraging independence related to his reporting that he made the main decisions about the child ($r = -.51$, $p < .01$). His encouraging the child to continue related to reports of his being strict about the child's going away from the house alone ($r = -.29$, $p < .05$), his closely supervising her play by knowing where she was at all times ($r = -.26$, $p < .05$), his helping her when she asked for it even if she could do it by herself ($r = -.32$, $p < .05$), his using some physical discipline ($r = .32$, $p < .05$), and his reports of the child's reacting negatively to being left with a stranger ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$).

By comparing the fathers' interview about reported attitudes and behaviors

with the child's behaviors in the two situations, it is possible to evaluate, in another way, the possible consistencies and inconsistencies in the fathers' reported behaviors. In the independence-producing situation, the child's behavior of watching the parent do the puzzle related to the father's reporting that he helped the child when she asked for it even if she could do it herself ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$), that he never disciplined the child verbally ($r = -.70$, $p < .01$), that his wife was very strict with the child ($r = -.30$, $p < .05$), that he spent little time with her on weekends ($r = -.26$, $p < .05$), and that he did not encourage her to act independent ($r = -.26$, $p < .05$). The child's responding to the father related to his reporting that the child's obedience was very important to him ($r = -.26$, $p < .05$) and that he did not closely supervise her play activity ($r = .28$, $p < .05$).

In the dependence-producing situation, the child's responding to her father related to his reporting that he was strict with her in general ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$), that he was specifically strict with her in not letting her go away from the house alone ($r = -.30$, $p < .05$), that he allowed her much independence in her play activities ($r = .42$, $p < .01$), that he physically disciplined her ($r = .27$, $p < .05$), and that he spent a great deal of time with her both during the week ($r = .37$, $p < .01$) and on weekends ($r = .29$, $p < .05$). The child's statement of difficulty correlated with her father's reporting that he was strict about allowing her away from the house alone ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$), that he always wanted to know where she was when she was playing ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$), that he used physical discipline with her ($r = .30$, $p < .05$), that he spent little time with her on weekends ($r = -.35$, $p < .05$), and his reporting that the child desired much participation from him ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$). The child's attempts to withdraw from the situation and not do the difficult puzzle related to her father's reporting that he usually helped the child when she asked for it even when she could do it herself ($r = -.48$, $p < .01$), that he taught her things before she went to school ($r = .28$, $p < .05$), that he spent little time with her on weekends ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$), and his reporting that she reacted negatively to being left with a stranger ($r = -.29$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

As is evident from the results of the study, fathers' reports of their behaviors and their behaviors when actually observed may be quite different. Although some evidence is available indicating that such discrepancies may exist, the assumption has often been made that the same domain is being tapped with either observations or interviews. Because of this reasoning, one method has often been substituted for the other as a reasonable alternative.

A comparison of the data obtained from the interviews and observations has shown several consistenciew as well as many differences. In comparing the father's reported and his observed behaviors, consistencies occurred more often in his helping and demanding behaviors, and in his behaviors indicating non-involvement with the child. Inconsistencies were most evident between the reported and observed degree of his encouragement of the child's independence.

Important relationships were also noted between the fathers' reported behaviors and the child's observed behaviors. The father's reports about his reactions to the child's independent and dependent behaviors were consistent with her observed independence and dependence in the behavioral situation, and his reports about spending much time with his child and being involved with her were consistent with her observed responsiveness to him. Inconsistency was revealed between some of his reported demands and her responsiveness to him. It is interesting to note that greater consistency was present between the father's reports of encouragement of dependent and independent behavior and the child's observed behavior, than between father's reported and observed behavior in this area.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that the method used to gather information in studying the parent-child relationship will influence the kinds of results that are obtained. In addition, fathers as well as mothers play significant roles in the family. More data is needed concerning possible consistencies and inconsistencies which can be obtained with different methods, and more information is necessary to determine reasons for their existence.

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Footnote

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